

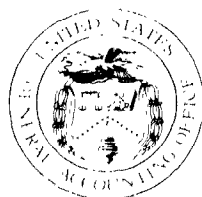
GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,
Subcommittee on Postal Operations and
Services, Committee on Post Office and
Civil Service, House of Representatives

February 1992

POSTAL SERVICE

Work Hour Allocations to High Growth and Low Growth Post Offices





General Government Division

B-247532

February 27, 1992

The Honorable Frank McCloskey
Chairman, Subcommittee on Postal
Operations and Services
Committee on Post Office and
Civil Service
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This briefing report responds to your request that we examine U.S. Postal Service work hour allocations to its post offices in areas with high work load growth and its post offices in areas with low work load growth during fiscal year (FY) 1990. Specifically, we used statistical analyses of FY 1990 work hour data for 515 large U.S. post offices¹ to determine whether (1) work hour budget overruns were widespread among post offices in high work load growth areas and (2) post offices in these areas had more frequent overruns than post offices in low work load growth areas.

On February 13, 1992, we briefed the Subcommittee on the results of our review. This briefing report summarizes the information we provided.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Postal Service has been operating with tight budgets in order to improve its financial position. Such budgets can provide incentives to hold down costs; they also represent managerial challenges for postal organizations. On the other hand, when clearly insufficient resources are allocated, this insufficiency can put management pressure on employees to perform beyond their capability. It can also exact a toll on labor-management relations and customer service.

Over the past 6 years, we have identified and reported on postal operational problems at several high growth offices that suffered from insufficient work hour budget allocations. In these instances, the Postal Service failed to adequately fund work load growth. Appendix II

¹We defined "large" as those post offices in the top 3 of 12 revenue categories and with over 10,000 possible deliveries to residences or businesses.

provides further details on our related prior work.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

Our statistical analyses of the Postal Service's allocation and use of budgeted work hours for FY 1990 showed that 49 percent (or 250) of the 515 post offices we reviewed stayed within their budget.² The remaining 51 percent (or 265) were almost equally split in their work hour use: 26 percent (or 135) overran their work hour budget by more than 2 percent; 25 percent (or 130) underran their budget by more than 1 percent. Appendix III provides further details on our statistical analyses.

Post offices in high work load growth areas overran their work hour budgets at a proportionally higher rate than did post offices in low work load growth areas. Thirty-four percent (or 12) of the 35 high work load growth post offices exceeded their FY 1990 work hour budgets by more than 2 percent, compared to 24 percent (or 67) of the low work load growth offices. Similarly, a higher percentage (26 percent, or 72) of post offices with low work load growth performed under budget by more than 1 percent, compared to 20 percent (or 7) of the 35 high work load growth offices. Thus, based solely on how work hours were used, FY 1990 work hour allocations tended to favor post offices in low work load growth areas. However, the imbalance is not striking. Appendix IV provides information about the growth rate and budget performance for the high work load growth and low work load growth offices we assessed.

In FY 1991, the Postal Service largely corrected the slight work hour imbalance in FY 1990. A larger proportion of high growth offices than low growth offices received a work hour budget increase of 1 percent or more. Furthermore, a larger proportion of low work load growth offices received a FY 1991 work hour budget reduction of 1 percent or more. Thirty-three percent (or 4) of the 12 high work load growth post offices received increased work hour budgets in FY 1991. Only 6 percent (or 4) of the 67 low work load growth offices received a FY 1991 increase. On the other hand, about 70 percent (or 47) of the 67 low work load growth offices received work hour reductions in FY 1991; only 29 percent (or 2)

²We defined "staying within budget" as being within 2 percent over allocated work hours and 1 percent under allocated work hours.

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of the 7 high work load growth offices had FY 1991 work hour reductions.

For FY 1990, Postal Service work hour budget allocations tracked high work load growth closer than indicated by our prior work at selected individual post offices. Our examination of FY 1990 work hour budget performance showed that high growth was not a direct predictor of failure to operate within budget. Only one-third of the high growth offices exceeded their budgets by more than 2 percent.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We focused our analysis of work hour budget data on the 515 largest post offices for which the Postal Service was able to provide complete data.³ As Postal Service officials recommended, we used the change in the number of possible deliveries from FY 1989 to FY 1990 to indicate the amount of work load growth.⁴ (See app. I for specific information about our methodology.)


Postal officials in the Department of the Controller reviewed a draft of this briefing report and suggested no changes. We did our work from November 1989 through August 1991 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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As agreed with the Subcommittee, we are sending copies of this report to the Postmaster General. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

The major contributors to this briefing report are listed in appendix V. If you have any questions, please call me at (202) 275-8676.

Sincerely yours,



L. Nye Stevens
Director, Government Business
Operations Issues

³The Postal Service was unable to provide complete data on 72 other post offices in this category.

⁴The "number of possible deliveries" means the number of sites to which mail deliveries were made.

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	<u>ABBREVIATION</u>	
FY	fiscal year	

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

To respond to a request from the Chairman, Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services, House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, we used statistical analyses of the Postal Service's fiscal year (FY) 1990 planned and actual work hours to determine whether (1) work hour budget overruns were widespread among post offices in high work load growth areas and (2) such occurrences were more common to post offices in high work load growth areas than in low work load growth areas.

To review the allocation of work hours to post offices, we analyzed growth rate and work hour budget data for 515 post offices that provide retail window and mail delivery services. We focused our analysis on the largest post offices, that is, those in the top 3 of 12 possible revenue categories, with over 10,000 possible deliveries to locations such as residences or businesses. The Postal Service was unable to provide complete data for 72 other large post offices in this category. We do not know how the data for those offices would have affected the results of our analysis.

For the 515 post offices, we obtained FY 1990 data on planned and actual work hours for delivery and customer service activities, the predominant work at these offices. We used the combined delivery and customer service work hours in our work hour analyses.

As Postal Service officials recommended, we used the change in the number of possible deliveries from FY 1989 to FY 1990 as the indicator of work load growth in the post office areas. We considered over 4 percent to be "high growth" and under 1 percent to be "low growth." We obtained similar statistical results when we considered 125 post offices with over 2 percent growth as "high growth." We did not assess the reliability of the computerized work load data because the task would have been too complex and time consuming. Postal Service officials routinely rely on these data for management purposes.

We also visited a high work load growth and a low work load growth post office in the Southern Maryland Division--Bowie and Mt. Rainier, respectively--to compare their budget performance and discuss work hour allocation procedures.

PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS
AT HIGH GROWTH POST OFFICES

Over the past 6 years, we have identified and reported on postal operational problems at several high growth offices that suffered from insufficient work hour budget allocations. In these instances, the Postal Service failed to adequately fund work load growth. The following reports are illustrative.

- Letter Carriers' Work Load and Overtime Concerns at Irvington Station, Fremont, California (GAO/GGD-85-39, Apr. 15, 1985). We reported that high rates of carrier overtime caused employee complaints. Local postal officials said high rates of overtime developed due to unanticipated rapid growth in work load.
- Postal Service: Labor-Management Relations and Customer Services at the Simi Valley, California, Post Office (GAO/GGD-88-44, Mar. 3, 1988). We reported, among other things, that customers expressed concern about poor services that were caused by inadequate staffing and ineffective monitoring of mail route growth.
- Postal Service: Progress Made in Restoring Deteriorated Northern Virginia Mail Service (GAO/GGD-89-88, June 16, 1989). Lack of adequate resources to handle the growth in demand for mail delivery services ultimately led to the near collapse of the Northern Virginia delivery system. We reported that the Postal Service allowed mail delivery services at post offices in Northern Virginia to become a major management problem before taking corrective action.
- Provision of Mail Delivery Services in a High-Growth Area (GAO/T-GGD-90-13, Dec. 11, 1989). In testimony at a hearing before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services and the Subcommittee on Postal Personnel and Modernization in San Diego, we reported that, although Northern Virginia and San Diego both experienced rapid growth, there is no reason to believe that the San Diego area faced immediate problems in postal operations of the magnitude faced by Northern Virginia. One important difference was that San Diego's employment level had increased, while Northern Virginia had experienced a hiring freeze. The hearing focused on endemic stress among Postal workers in high growth areas.

In addition, a congressional report⁵ on a 1991 appropriations bill cited a February 26, 1990, letter we wrote to the Postmaster General concerning service problems caused by the Postal Service's difficulty in keeping pace with demand in the fast-growing Lincoln Park section of Chicago. The Postal Service said it was determined to take corrective actions, including reallocating resources.

⁵Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Bill, 1991, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Report 101-589 (July 11, 1990).

OUR STATISTICAL ANALYSES OF THE POSTAL SERVICE'S
FISCAL YEAR 1990 WORK HOUR DATA

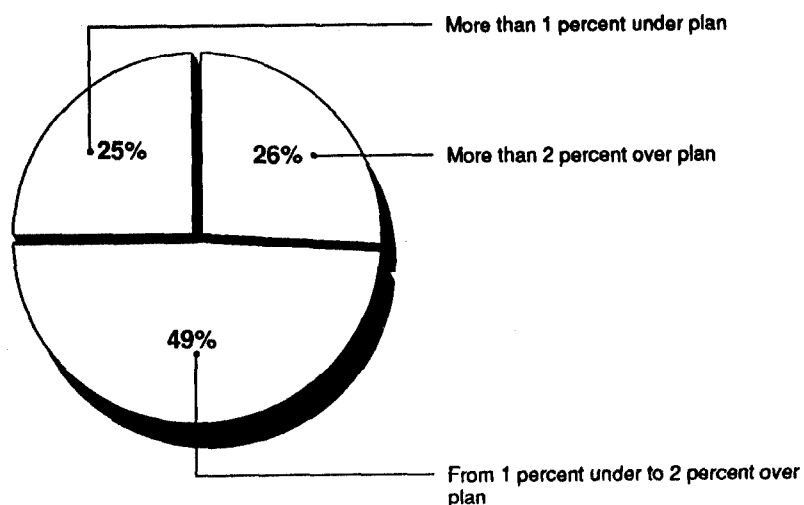
Our statistical analyses of the Postal Service's FY 1990 allocation and use of work hours showed that nearly half of the 515 post offices we reviewed were able to stay within their budgeted work hour allocations. The remaining 265 post offices include both high and low work load growth offices; some operated over their work hour budgets and some operated under their work hour budgets. We noticed a slight tendency for post offices in high work load growth areas to overrun their work hour budgets more than post offices in low work load growth areas. Similarly, we found that post offices in low work load growth areas performed more frequently under their work hour budgets. Nevertheless, we identified no systematic disparity in work hour budget usage, although the work hours allocated in FY 1990 slightly favored post offices in low work load growth areas.

In FY 1991, however, the Postal Service corrected the slight disparity in 1990 budget allocations for work hours. A greater percentage of post offices in high work load growth areas received higher budget allocations for work hours, while a higher percentage of post offices in low work load growth areas received reduced work hour allocations.

WORK HOUR USAGE FOR FY 1990

For FY 1990, 49 percent (or 250) of the 515 post offices we reviewed essentially kept work hour usage within budget (1 percent under allocated work hours to 2 percent over). The remaining 51 percent (or 265) was almost equally split: 26 percent (or 135) of the offices exceeded their work hour budget by more than 2 percent, and 25 percent (or 130) of the offices underran their work hour budget by more than 1 percent. (See fig. III.1.)

Figure III.1: FY 1990 Post Office Work
Hour Budget Performance

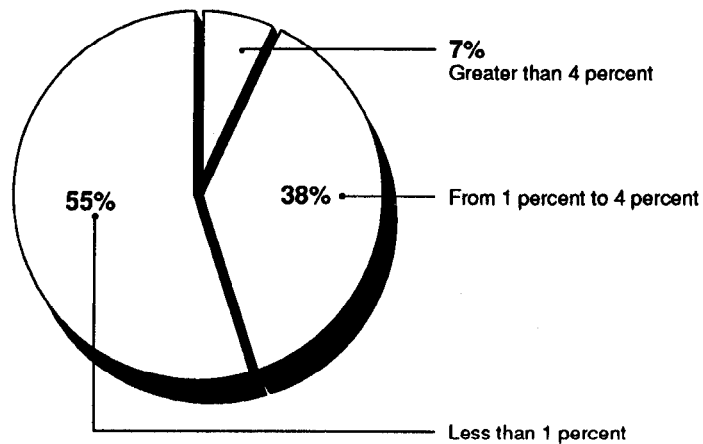


Work Load Growth for 1990

As the indicator of work load growth, we used the change in the number of possible deliveries from FY 1989 to FY 1990. For analyses, we considered over 4 percent to be "high growth" and less than 1 percent to be "low growth." During FY 1990, the work load growth rates for the 515 offices were

- over 4 percent for 35 offices (or 7 percent of the 515 post offices),
- from 1 to 4 percent for 198 offices (or 38 percent), and
- less than 1 percent for 282 offices (or 55 percent) (see fig. III.2).

Figure III.2: FY 1990 Post Office Work Load Growth



Comparison of Work Hour Usage for High and Low Work Load Growth Post Offices

We assessed post offices in high or low work load growth areas that exceeded or fell below their budgeted work hours by a certain percentage. For the 35 post offices with high work load growth, 34 percent (or 12) exceeded their work hour budgets for mail delivery and customer service by more than 2 percent. In contrast, 24 percent (or 67) of the 282 offices with low work load growth overran their budgets by more than 2 percent. Similarly, a higher percentage of low work load growth offices than high work load growth offices underran their work hour budgets by more than 1 percent. An underrun of more than 1 percent was achieved by 26 percent (or 72) of the 282 low work load growth offices and 20 percent (or 7) of the 35 high work load growth offices.

To describe the work environment in the post offices we reviewed, we characterized them as follows:

- "stressful": the 12 high work load growth offices (34 percent of 35) with a work hour budget overrun of more than 2 percent;
- "comfortable": the 72 low work load growth offices (26 percent of 282) with a budget underrun of more than 1 percent;

- "frugal": the 7 high work load growth offices (20 percent of 35) with a budget underrun of more than 1 percent; and
- "lenient": the 67 low work load growth offices (24 percent of 282) with a budget overrun of more than 2 percent.

(See app. IV for a breakdown of the performance in the specific post offices we reviewed.)

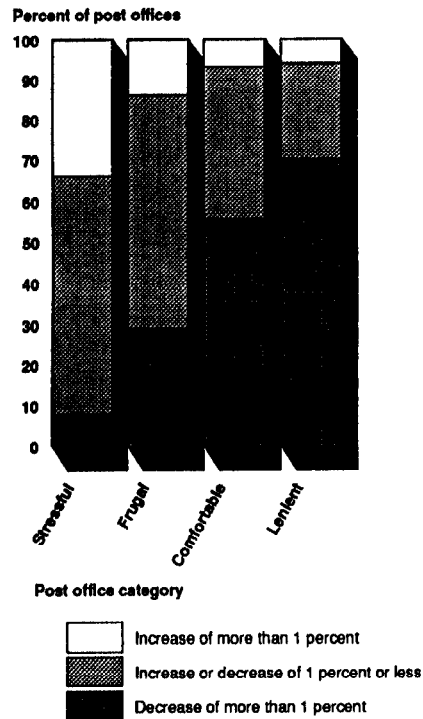
FY 1991 WORK HOUR ALLOCATIONS CORRECTED DISPARITIES TO SOME EXTENT

Work hour allocations in FY 1991 did not perpetuate the FY 1990 differences in these allocations between high work load growth and low work load growth offices. As shown in figure III.3, FY 1991 work hour allocations were shifted to post offices in high work load growth areas and away from post offices in low work load growth areas.

Of the 12 high work load growth post offices designated as "stressful" in FY 1990, 33 percent (or 4) received increased work hour budgets in FY 1991. The increases were 1 percent or more above these post offices' actual work hour use in FY 1990. About 8 percent (or 1) of these 12 post offices received a budget reduction of 1 percent or more in FY 1991, however. On the other hand, only 6 percent (or 4) of the 67 low work load growth post offices designated as "lenient" in FY 1990 received a FY 1991 increase in work hours of 1 percent or more. Instead, 70 percent (or 47) of these 67 post offices had their work hour budget allocations reduced by 1 percent or more in FY 1991.

In addition, the FY 1991 Postal Service work allocation budget cut work hour allocations more for the 72 low work load growth post offices characterized as "comfortable" in FY 1990 than it did for the 7 high work load growth post offices characterized as "frugal" in FY 1990. About 56 percent (or 40) of the "comfortable" post offices received budget cuts of 1 percent or more. However, only 29 percent (or two) of the seven "frugal" post offices received budget reductions of that dimension.

Figure III.3: FY 1991 Budgeted Work Hours Compared to FY 1990 Actual Work Hours



CONCLUSIONS

For FY 1990, Postal Service work hour budget allocations tracked high work load growth closer than indicated by our prior work at selected individual post offices. Our examination of FY 1990 work hour budget performance showed that high growth was not a direct predictor of failure to operate within budget. Only one-third of the high growth offices exceeded their budgets by more than 2 percent.

For FY 1990, the proportion of high work load growth post offices that overran their work hour budget by more than 2 percent was greater than those post offices with low work load growth that had similar overruns. Conversely, for post offices that underran their work hour budgets by more than 1 percent, the number of low

APPENDIX III

APPENDIX III

work load growth post offices was proportionally greater than the number of high work load growth offices. Thus, FY 1990 work hour allocations slightly favored post offices in low work load growth areas. However, disparities were not striking.

In FY 1991, the Postal Service corrected the difference to some degree. The proportion of high work load growth post offices that received increased work hours of 1 percent or more above their FY 1990 usage was greater than the proportion of work hours allocated to low work load growth post offices. Furthermore, low work load growth post offices more often received reduced work hour allocations of 1 percent or more than did high work load growth post offices.

POST OFFICES REVIEWED

In comparing FY 1990 work hour usage for 158 post offices with high work load growth and those with low work load growth, we divided the post offices into the following four categories:

1. "stressful" offices with high work load growth and work hour budget overruns of more than 2 percent,
2. "comfortable" offices with low work load growth and work hour budget underruns of more than 1 percent,
3. "frugal" offices with high work load growth and work hour budget underruns of more than 1 percent, and
4. "lenient" offices with low work load growth and work hour budget overruns of more than 2 percent.

In the first category we reviewed the performance of 12 post offices; in the second category we reviewed 72 post offices; in the third category we reviewed 7 post offices; and in the fourth category we reviewed 67 post offices (see tables IV.1-IV.4). Our review was based on data from a universe of 515 of the largest post offices with over 10,000 possible deliveries. The following tables show the rate of work load growth in possible deliveries from FY 1989 to FY 1990 and the percent by which the post offices exceeded or fell short of planned performance levels for budgeted delivery and customer service work hours.

Table IV.1: FY 1990 Growth Rate and Performance for
12 "Stressful" Post Offices

Post office	Growth rate (Percent)	Performance to plan ^a (Percent)
Auburn, WA	6.9	4.6
Beaverton, OR	4.7	5.2
Chico, CA	4.7	3.3
Everett, WA	5.4	4.4
Farmington, MI	4.4	2.8
Frederick, MD	38.6	3.8
Fremont, CA	4.9	7.0
Kissimmee, FL	8.2	9.6
Laguna Beach, CA	8.3	4.9
Lancaster, CA	7.5	10.8
Lynnwood, WA	4.6	7.2
Santa Clara, CA	7.9	2.7

^aPercent that actual FY 1990 delivery service work hours and customer service work hours, combined, exceeded planned work hours for those functions.

Table IV.2: FY 1990 Growth Rate and Performance
for 72 "Comfortable" Post Offices

Post office	Growth rate (%)	Perf. to plan ^a (%)	Post office	Growth rate (%)	Perf. to plan ^a (%)
Addison, IL	0.6	-1.8	Mesa, AZ	0.9	-1.3
Albany, GA	0.9	-2.0	Metairie, LA	1.0	-1.7
Anderson, IN	-1.2	-3.3	Midland, TX	0.0	-2.2
Athens, GA	0.0	-1.6	Millville, NJ	-2.4	-1.6
Aurora, CO	-0.6	-2.8	Newark, OH	-1.9	-3.3
Bellmore, NY	0.1	-1.5	Newport News, VA	-0.6	-3.1
Berwyn, IL	-1.9	-3.4	Northbrook, IL	-0.8	-2.6
Bloomington, IL	0.4	-1.3	Oaklawn, IL	1.0	-1.2
Brea, CA	0.4	-2.0	Ogden, UT	0.5	-2.6
Bridgeport, CT	0.3	-2.2	Owensboro, IN	0.5	-1.1
Bristol, VA	-3.8	-2.7	Oxnard, CA	0.6	-1.1
Camden, NJ	-0.9	-3.0	Pasadena, CA	0.4	-2.9
Carrollton, TX	0.9	-2.5	Passaic, NJ	0.1	-2.2
Champaign, IL	0.6	-3.3	Patchogue, NY	-2.1	-2.8
Cherry Hill, NJ	-0.7	-3.7	Pittston, PA	0.0	-1.3
Clifton, NJ	-0.2	-1.1	Port Washington, NY	0.4	-2.3
Concord, CA	0.1	-4.8	Portsmouth, NH	-0.5	-1.9
Covington, KY	0.7	-3.0	Portsmouth, VA	0.7	-4.1
El Monte, CA	0.1	-2.8	Princeton, NJ	-4.4	-3.0
Forest Park, GA	0.4	-3.9	Rocky Mount, NC	0.4	-3.2
Fullerton, CA	0.0	-2.2	Saginaw, MI	0.4	-3.3
Garden Grove, CA	0.2	-1.0	San Fernando, CA	0.8	-1.8
Garden City, NY	-0.8	-3.0	San Leandro, CA	0.2	-3.7
Hagerstown, MD	0.5	-1.1	Santa Maria, CA	-0.6	-1.4
Jefferson, MO	0.3	-2.8	Smyrna, GA	1.0	-5.1
Kankakee, IL	0.1	-3.7	St Petersburg, FL	0.4	-1.0
Lake Charles, LA	0.7	-1.4	Stuart, FL	0.5	-2.9
Lakeland, FL	0.3	-1.3	Tuscaloosa, AL	0.8	-2.3
Lawton, OK	0.1	-1.6	Union, NJ	0.0	-2.6
Lima, OH	-1.8	-1.4	Union City, CA	-1.9	-1.8
Lincoln Park, MI	0.2	-2.4	Utica, NY	0.0	-1.5
Lutherville, MD	0.1	-1.2	Vineland, NJ	-0.4	-2.5
Mansfield, OH	-0.3	-3.1	Wallingford, CT	0.8	-4.1
Maywood, IL	0.9	-1.4	Warminster, PA	0.6	-9.0
Menlo Park, CA	0.1	-4.9	Waukegan, IL	0.6	-1.1
Merced, CA	-0.4	-2.3	Wyandotte, MI	0.3	-2.3

^aPercent that actual FY 1990 delivery service work hours and customer service work hours, combined, exceeded planned work hours for those functions.

Table IV.3: FY 1990 Growth Rate and Performance for Seven "Frugal" Post Offices

Post office	Growth rate (%)	Performance to plan ^a (%)
Berkeley, CA	4.2	-2.5
Dover, NJ	7.4	-5.1
Florence, KY	4.9	-2.2
Hopkins, MN	5.9	-1.6
Mundelein, IL	5.4	-5.4
Pawtucket, RI	4.1	-1.9
Roswell, GA	4.8	-3.0

^aPercent that actual FY 1990 delivery service work hours and customer service work hours, combined, exceeded planned work hours for those functions.

Table IV.4: FY 1990 Growth Rate and Performance
for 67 "Lenient" Post Offices

Post office	Growth rate (%)	Perf. to plan ^a (%)	Post office	Growth rate (%)	Perf. to plan ^a (%)
Amarillo, TX	0.1	2.3	Lafayette, LA	0.0	4.4
Arlington, TX	0.2	2.4	McAllen, TX	0.9	2.2
Ashland, KY	-1.0	8.5	Midland, MI	0.7	4.0
Atlantic City, NJ	-5.1	2.8	Monroe, LA	0.3	6.9
Bartlesville, OK	0.2	2.3	Muncie, IN	0.0	3.8
Battle Creek, MI	0.5	2.6	New London, CT	0.4	3.1
Bensalem, PA	0.0	2.7	New Bedford, RI	0.7	4.4
Bethesda, MD	0.1	2.1	Niagara Falls, NY	-2.1	2.7
Birmingham, MI	-2.2	12.8	North Hollywood, CA	0.9	3.2
Bloomington, IN	-3.8	11.0	Northridge, CA	0.7	6.0
Brookfield, WI	0.7	3.4	Norwich, CT	-2.7	2.3
Burlington, VT	-2.7	5.7	Ocala, FL	0.3	2.5
Camp Hill, PA	0.6	2.1	Orange, NJ	-1.7	3.4
Danville, IL	0.5	3.5	Palo Alto, CA	-0.5	4.5
Decatur, IL	-1.0	2.1	Parkersburg, WV	0.5	2.3
Deerfield, IL	-9.1	3.5	Pasadena, TX	-0.2	2.8
Dubuque, IA	0.2	2.5	Peabody, MA	0.4	2.7
Elizabeth, NJ	-0.1	3.9	Plymouth, MI	0.1	3.1
Englewood, NJ	0.8	9.9	Pontiac, MI	-0.4	3.6
Fair Lawn, NJ	-0.6	4.9	Provo, UT	1.0	4.5
Fond Du Lac, WI	0.6	2.2	Pueblo, CO	-0.4	2.9
Grand Forks, ND	1.0	3.7	Ridgewood, NJ	0.1	3.3
Grand Prairie, TX	0.4	5.0	Rochester, MN	0.8	2.2
Hattiesburg, MS	0.3	4.3	Santa Clara, CA	0.6	3.1
Hickory, NC	0.0	2.7	Scranton, PA	0.5	3.3
Hinsdale, IL	-3.6	2.0	Silver Spring, MD	0.7	2.4
Huntsville, AL	0.2	2.3	Stillwater, OK	0.2	3.4
Hutchinson, KS	-0.1	2.8	Warren, MI	-0.2	2.1
Hyattsville, MD	-1.3	7.0	Wayne, NJ	0.8	5.2
Jackson, TN	0.3	3.2	Westwood, NJ	0.5	2.2
Jersey City, NJ	0.7	2.3	Wichita Falls, TX	0.1	2.5
Johnson City, TN	0.7	3.2	Willoughby, OH	0.4	2.9
Jonesboro, AR	-0.4	4.0	Winter Park, FL	0.8	2.2
La Puente, CA	0.6	3.8			

^aPercent that actual FY 1990 delivery service work hours and customer service work hours, combined, exceeded planned work hours for those functions.

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